

# At West Point With Poe

Perhaps the only living classmate of Edgar Allan Poe while at West Point is Colonel Timothy Pickens Jones of this city, says the Seguin, Tex., correspondent of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, a lovely gentleman now in his ninetieth year, still vigorous and with a mind as clear as that of a man of 50, delighting in entertaining his friends with reminiscences of the unfortunate poet and another of his boyhood friends, Davy Crockett.

"Edgar Allan Poe has been eulogized, scandalized, admired and defamed," said Colonel Jones, "and as one who knew him intimately I can truthfully say that he was a man of master mind, a loyal friend and a man who did not hesitate or fear to express his contempt and hatred for an enemy. Poe could have with the most intense hatred, and there was not a cowardly drop of blood in his veins; he was one of the game hen's chickens if ever there was one."

"I entered West Point July 1, 1830, at the same time with Edgar Allan Poe, and we were classmates and tentmates—we were 'buddies,' as the boys say now. Poe was in his twenty-second year and I in my fifteenth, and I confess I felt flattered that the young man should take a fancy to me and seek my friendship and companionship. I realized, even in my young years, that he was an exceptionally brilliant fellow, studying but little, but always perfect in recitations, save in mathematics, which he boldly declared had no place in the brain of an intellectual man—too dull and commonplace. The strict discipline, the mathematical requirements of the military school kept my friend in an unhappy frame of mind and when he would get a case of the blues or have a fit-up with one of

the professors, he would say: 'Come Pick, let's hit ourselves over to 'Old Benny's.'"

"This was a joint where the rankest kind of wet goods went out of the bottles, jugs and kegs to the West Point boys, and I dare say 'Old Benny's' proved the ruin of many a young fellow. I am glad that the government bought the place and put 'Old Benny' out of business. Well, when Poe and I would reach that emporium he would pour down drink after drink, and they were no 'ponies,' either, but four and six fingers. It was simply impossible for me to get Poe to consent to return to the buildings until he had satisfied his appetite—until he was thoroughly and capitolly soaked. It was then that I always had my hands full, for Poe in this condition was a regular demon and would fight a cage of wildcats, and he didn't care much who it was that he met if he could get up a scrap. There was one professor, Dr. Locke, whom Poe delighted in annoying, and he hated him with a holy hatred. Locke did not like Poe, either, and the kettle was kept constantly boiling."

"Poe did not have a very wide circle of acquaintances or friends at West Point—he seeking the companionship of but few. I confess that he held a strange kind of hypnotic power over me, and I was almost powerless to resist his invitations or requests to slip out by the guards and go with him to 'Old Benny's.' While I knew after the first trip with him just what would happen, I could not say no. Drunk or sober, Poe was quick to resent a wrong or an insult, and his superior intellect, striking personality and his unquestioned fighting qualities made the boys have a strong respect for him. But he was a marked man, for the teachers

and officers were determined that he should be brought to bay."

"On a number of occasions he made Rome howl, and it was not until after being forced to straighten out in the guard house that he would agree to return to his room and conduct himself right. Well, it went from bad to worse, until January, 1831. Just six months after entering, he was tried by general court-martial for disobedience to superiors, neglect of duties and intoxication."

"There was no necessity for witnesses, for Poe entered a plea of guilty, saying that he was anxious to get out, and that he wasn't out out for a soldier. The sentence of dismissal did not take effect until the 6th of March, and the major portion of this intervening time was utilized by Poe in writing poetry, the greater portion of which was printed in book form, dedicated to the United States Corps of Cadets. But a large batch of the poems didn't get into the volume, they being for private circulation—circulated by being posted in conspicuous places on trees and buildings. These 'poems' were of the humble bee variety, very vicious, and were always copied by me at Poe's request. In these he slashed Locke and some of the other teachers and professors in a merciless manner."

"On the morning of the 6th of March, when he was ready to leave West Point, we were in our room together, and he told me I was one of the few true friends he had ever known, and as we talked the tears rolled down his cheeks. I say candidly that I thought a great deal of the talented young man. I had grown to love him, and I knew that he would have risked his life for me. He told me much of his past life, one part of which, he said, he had con-

fided to no other living soul. This was that while it was generally believed that he had gone to Greece in 1827 to offer his services to assist in putting down the Turkish oppressors, he had done no such thing, that about as near Europe as he ever got was Fort Independence, Boston harbor, where he enlisted, and was assigned to battery H, First artillery, which was afterward transferred to Fortress Monroe, Virginia."

"Poe told me that for nearly two years he yet his kindred and friends believe that he was fighting with the Greeks, but all the while he was wearing the uniform of Uncle Sam's soldiers and leading a rober and moral life. So closely had Poe guarded this that after his death both his admirers and irascibles in every book, magazine and newspaper spoke of Edgar Allan Poe as the example of Lord Byron, and spending more than a year battling with the Greeks. Even very recent writers have held to this yarn. I did not believe that Poe had told me a falsehood about the enlistment at Boston harbor, but to thoroughly satisfy myself I gathered from the war department at Washington these data, which are of record and cannot be disputed."

"Edgar Allan Poe, alias E. A. Perry, enlisted at Fort Independence, Boston harbor, May 26, 1827, the enlistment officer, Lieutenant H. Greenough, giving the following description: 'E. A. Perry; white, aged 22, height, five feet eight inches; hair brown, eyes gray; complexion, fair. Was transferred to Fortress Monroe, Va., with battery H, First artillery, was advanced to the non-commissioned staff, having shown ability that attracted attention; later he was made sergeant-major, and was destined to rapid advancement, when,

on April 14, 1829, he offered a substitute and was honorably discharged. When the substitute was offered it became necessary to properly legalize the papers, that 'E. A. Perry' give his right name, and then it was that the young sergeant-major declared himself Edgar Allan Poe, and his foster father, John Allan of Richmond, Va."

"Now, I do not think it would be easy to dispute these records, and yet Poe kept his secret well. It might be added, with every evidence of truth, too, that the chances are that Poe would have remained in the army, contented and satisfied, had it not been for the death of his adopted mother, Mrs. Allan of Richmond, on Feb. 27, nearly two months before he decided to sever his connection with the army. Poe loved this good woman—he told me so often—and when he learned of her death, he immediately quit the service. Poe had his faults, but I loved him, and may his soul rest in peace."

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